

Livable Communities Program – Executive Summary

Prepared for:



Ventura Council of Governments

for input into the Southern California Association of
Governments (SCAG) Regional Comprehensive Plan

Prepared by:

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Ventura Council of Governments (VCOG)

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Most of the material included in the *Executive Summary* was derived from VCOG's *1995 Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Reduction Report*. If you would like a copy of the Report, or have questions about the Livable Communities Program, contact:

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INTRODUCTION

The *Livable Communities Program* builds on the previous *1994/95 Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Reduction Program* by identifying, discussing and refining planning principles and land use implementation measures that may be appropriate for, and could be adapted to, each VCOG member jurisdiction.

PURPOSE

- Advance the 1994/95 VMT Reduction Planning Principles and Land Use Implementation Measures from general concepts to more specific examples that could be applied to local jurisdictions.
- Assist VCOG staff in working with staff from VCOG jurisdictions, and other stakeholders, so as to organize and present technical material to elected officials and other interested persons in a nontechnical format.
- Develop workshops to focus on and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of implementing innovative, “Livable Community” land use concepts.

GOALS

1. Identify and build on existing examples of innovative neo-traditional planning concepts in Ventura County.
2. Implement alternative planning principles and implementation measures which could:
 - a. Revitalize deteriorating city centers
 - b. Improve the viability of retail/employment centers
 - c. Encourage a variety of housing types and density
3. Provide a suggested framework for evaluating the effectiveness of alternative land use measures.
4. Minimize “fiscal zoning” conflicts which result in jurisdictional imbalances between jobs and housing in the County.
5. Provide VCOG jurisdictions with flexibility in achieving long-range innovative planning goals (i.e., endorse only planning principles or adopt more specific implementation measures).
6. Minimize tax-supported infrastructure costs.
7. Reduce air pollution and conserve nonrenewable energy resources.
8. Minimize the conversion of agricultural/open space land.

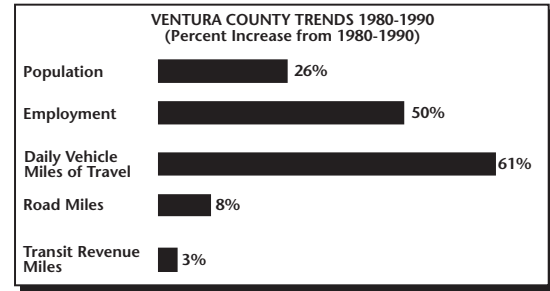
DISCUSSION

Current general plans and ordinances that influence urban form in Ventura County were, in many cases, prepared at a time when developing

PROGRAM FINDINGS/ CONCLUSIONS

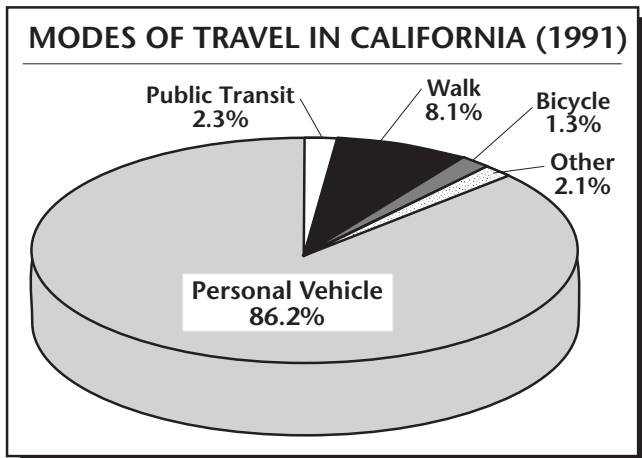
and preserving innovative urban form concepts was not an explicit purpose of these plans. Because some urban development policies/ordinances may not be consistent with the above goals, they may inadvertently contribute to public, institutional and governmental costs. These costs include increased air pollution, fragmentation of communities (lack of community “place” and identity), the inefficient use of nonrenewable energy resources and limited housing choices.

- 1. VMT is Increasing at a Faster Rate than Population** - Ventura County's VMT has increased at over twice the rate of population growth between 1980 and 1990.

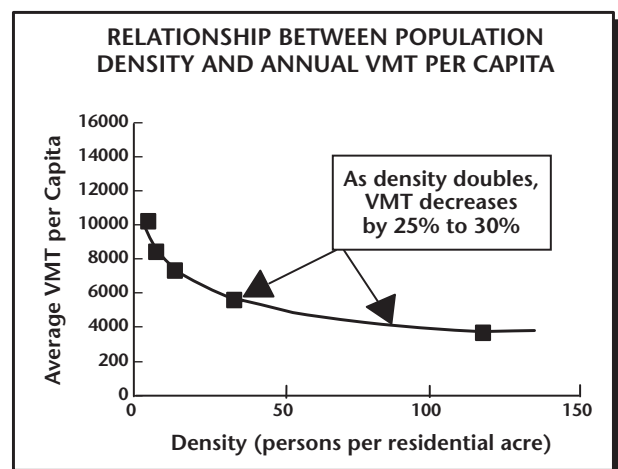


Source: Ventura County Congestion Management Program.

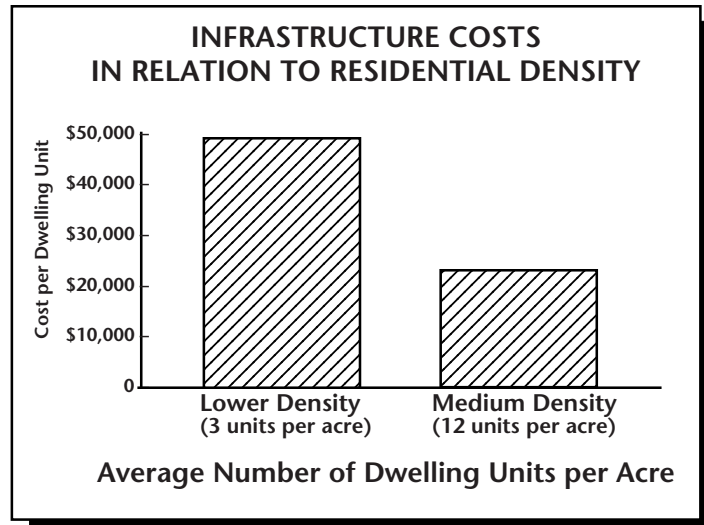
- 2. Vehicle Occupancy has Decreased Since 1977** - The County's residents are driving more, making longer trips and driving alone more frequently - vehicle occupancy has decreased almost 20% since 1977.
- 3. VMT Affects Ventura County's Air Quality** - The County does not meet Federal/State air quality standards - technical advances such as cleaner cars and better control measures have been offset by increased VMT.
- 4. Increases in Density can Reduce VMT** - Low-density, urban development patterns are heavily dependent on automobiles for mobility and access. More compact urban forms can decrease VMT.
- 5. Jobs/Housing Balance** - Several studies confirm that an appropriate balance between job and housing types positively affects VMT and commute trip length.



Source: The Land Use-Air Quality Linkage, California Air Resources Board



Source: CA Air Resources Board



Source: Energy Aware Planning Guide, California Energy Commission

6. **“Fiscal Zoning” Contributes to Increased VMT** - Zoning land predominantly for high revenue-generating and low services-demanding land uses restricts the housing supply thus contributing to a jobs/housing imbalance and increased VMT.
7. **Jobs/Housing Ratio Disparities** - Although VCOG’s jobs/housing ratio is similar to SCAG’s “equilibrium” ratio (1.22 vs. 1.21), there are significant variations in ratios between individual VCOG jurisdictions.
8. **Farmland/Open Space Conversion** - Between 1984 and 1992, about 1,300 acres of Ventura County’s farmland was converted annually to nonagricultural uses primarily because of continued low-density urban development.
9. **Urban Infrastructure is Costly to Provide and Maintain** - Revenues from new low-density, single-use development, in many cases, does not offset the capital and maintenance costs of urban infrastructure.
10. **Mobility/Access Factors and Jobs/Housing Ratios (1990 census) demonstrate:**
 - a. **Travel Time to Work** - Workers in VCOG cities with less average travel time than the subregion’s average, feature “balanced” or “excess jobs” ratios.
 - b. **Percent of Workers Employed in City of Residence** - Cities with a higher percentage of their workers employed within their boundaries had “balanced” or “excess jobs” ratios.
 - c. **Workers Mode of Travel** - More workers in West County cities (e.g., Fillmore, Oxnard, Port Hueneme and Santa Paula) “carpooled” and less “drove alone” than workers in central and east County cities.

PROGRAM LIMITATIONS

The following political, economic and social factors may affect a jurisdiction’s ability or willingness to implement innovative “livable communities” measures:

PLANNING PRINCIPLES AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

1. **Fiscal/Exclusionary Zoning** - Fiscal and exclusionary zoning results in a jobs/housing imbalance within the community which further increases VMT.
2. **Lack of Regional Planning** - Individual jurisdictions may make land use decisions with little regard for their regional impacts. Consequently, market forces often play a greater role in shaping growth patterns in many metropolitan areas.
3. **Residential Growth Control Ordinances** - Moratoria or restrictions on residential land use permits may halt or cap new housing construction thus contributing to jobs/housing imbalances.
4. **Reluctant Lending Institutions** - Institutional lenders may be reluctant to loan money on innovative urban development projects that integrate jobs/services producing land uses and residential land uses.
5. **Workers Earnings/Housing Cost Mismatches** - Mismatches occur when lower salaried workers are unable to afford higher priced housing.
6. **Multiple Wage-Earner Households** - These households may wish to live in a location between their respective worksites thus equalizing commuting distances.
7. **Job Turnover** - Individuals that switch jobs may have to commute longer distances if they elect to remain in their present housing.
8. **Workers May Not Assign a High Value to Living Near Their Worksites** - Other factors (good schools, safe neighborhood, life-style preferences) could be more highly valued than close proximity of jobsite and residence.
9. **Lack of Political Will** - Neo-traditional development lacks a strong constituency because of perceived limited benefits which results in a limited advocacy. Also, negative impacts (air pollution, congestion) accruing from conventional, low density urban uses may not be readily apparent.

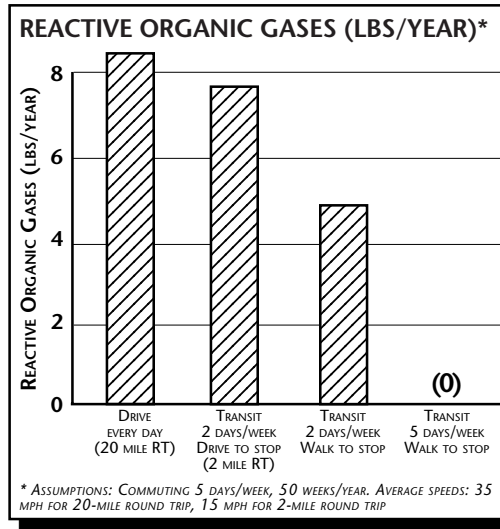
VCOG Planning Principles

VCOG endorsed twenty-four VMT Reduction Principles in 1995 (eleven "Regional" and thirteen "Community" principles). The Livable Communities Program will focus on the fourteen Principles most applicable to Neo-traditional planning concepts.

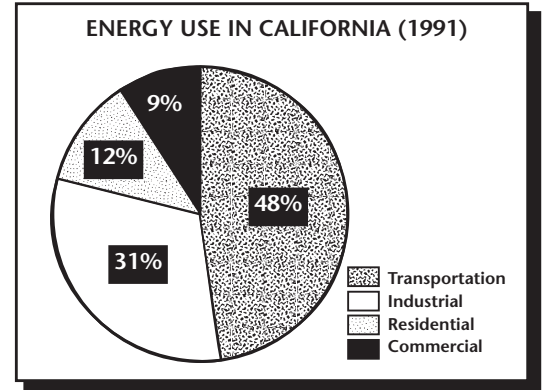
Regional:

1. More compact urban forms should be achieved by minimizing "step-out" development.
2. Minimize the conversion of agricultural/open space lands to urban land uses - protect existing "greenbelts" between the cities and encourage the establishment of new greenbelts.

3. Urban services and infrastructure should be provided in an efficient and cost-effective manner, prior to or concurrent with development.
4. Reduce air emissions (NOX, CO, ROG) and utilize nonrenewable energy resources more efficiently.



Source: Energy Aware Planning Guide, California Energy Commission

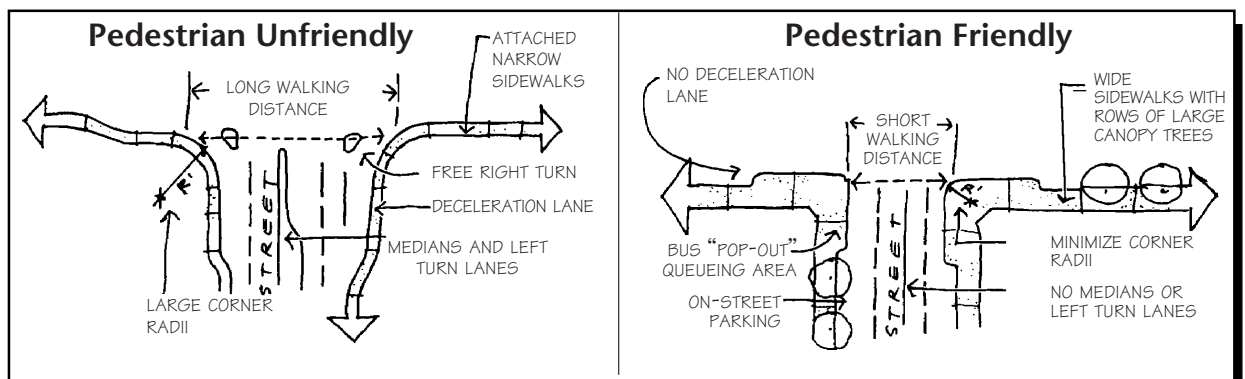


Source: Energy Aware Planning Guide, California Energy Commission

5. Regional institutions and services (museums, entertainment facilities, government, etc.) should be located in or adjacent to the urban core.
6. VMT should be reduced both countywide and locally through coordinated and comprehensive land use and transportation planning efforts.
7. Levels of Service (LOS) should be improved on transportation corridors and at key interchanges and intersections.

Community:

8. Compact urban forms should be encouraged that promote a greater sense of "community" and pedestrian-friendly settlement patterns.
9. A community should contain a diversity of housing/job types that enables residents from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to work and reside within its boundaries.
10. Locate jobs, housing, services and other activities within easy walking distance of each other and transit stops.

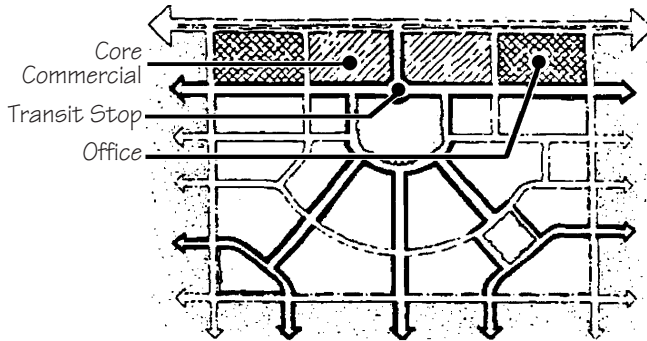


Source: Land Use, Transportation & Air Quality, County of San Bernardino, Dec, 1993.

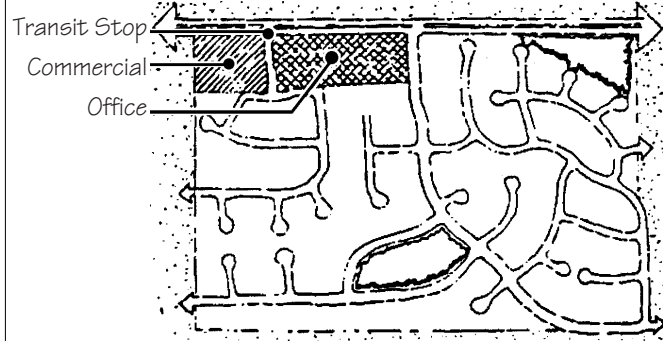
Laguna West, Sacramento County

Integrated as compared to Traditional Development Pattern

INTEGRATED



ISOLATED



Clear, formalized and inter-connected street systems make destinations visible, provide the shortest and most direct path to destinations and result in security through community rather than by isolation.

Source: Energy Aware Planning Guide, Policy L.2.3, January 1993

LAND USE IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

11. The location and character of the community should be consistent with a larger transit network.
12. The community should have a center focus that combines commercial, civic, government, cultural and recreation uses.
13. Public spaces should be designed to encourage the attention and presence of people at all hours of the day and night.
14. Streets, pedestrian paths and bike paths should contribute to a system of fully-connected and interesting routes to all destinations.

Nine VMT Reduction land-use related measures were identified and endorsed by VCOG in 1995. The Livable Communities Program will focus on and discuss the “measures” options, examples and implementation advantages/disadvantages below.

BALANCED DEVELOPMENT

Balancing jobs and housing within an area can lead to a reduction in VMT and air pollution and increase the “livability” of urban places. This can be achieved by adding jobs to “housing rich” areas and/or adding housing to “jobs rich” areas.

Selected Balanced Development Options:

- **Revise General Plans, Specific Plans and Zoning Ordinances** - plans and codes should permit alternative forms of development (e.g., mixed-use projects).

PEDESTRIAN ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (POD)

- **Review Residential Growth Control Ordinances** - balance employment/revenue generating land uses and housing supply.
- **Rezone Properties** - designate housing in commercial areas and job-generating uses in residential areas.

Example:

The Ahmanson Ranch proposal adjusted its ratio of residential to commercial/office uses to more accurately reflect the project's actual housing needs.

Advantages:

- Increase the VCOG region's supply of scarce affordable housing.
- Give more employees the chance to live closer to their worksites.

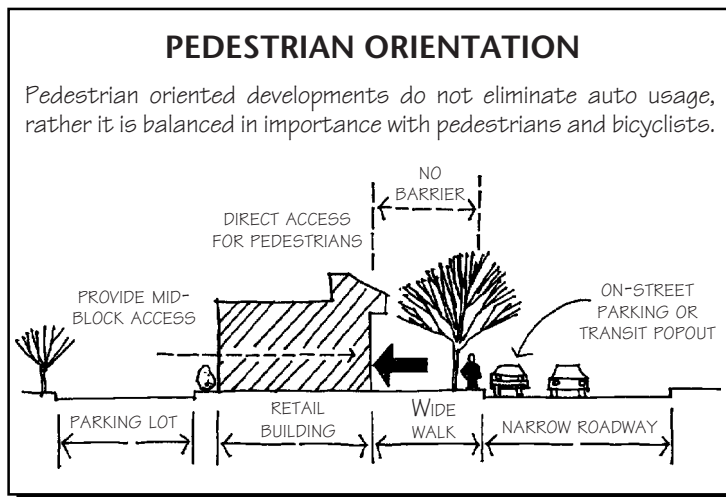
Disadvantages:

- Residents may object to locating job-creating facilities adjacent to housing.
- The marketability of neo-traditional projects may be a problem

Communities can be modified to make them more attractive for residents by providing safe, direct and convenient pedestrian access between residences and a variety of destinations.

Selected POD Options:

- **Direct Access** - provide continuous sidewalks which are separated from the street by landscaping or on-street parking.
- **Maximize Safety** - provide adequate lighting and make walkways visible from buildings, streets and parking lots - lower traffic speeds, signage and signals also enhance safety.
- **Street Trees** - creates a more pleasant walking environment and provides shade and reduces heat buildup on paved surfaces.
- **Building Design** - orient buildings toward the street to encourage browsing and improve access to businesses.
- **Provide Amenities** - public places with mini-parks, benches, fountains and sidewalk cafes add pedestrian interest.



Source: Land Use, Transportation & Air Quality, County of San Bernardino, Dec, 1993.

Example:

The City of Fillmore Specific Plan strengthens the City's historic, small town atmosphere by promoting a pedestrian-oriented downtown with a compact mixture of uses and buildings located near the front property line and parking in the rear of the buildings.

CITY OF FILLMORE • DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN



New & renovated buildings should express Fillmore's historic street level building increment of 25 to 50 feet.

Source: Downtown Specific Plan, City of Fillmore, March 1994.

Advantages:

- Pedestrian activity encourages interactive and friendly communities.
- Reducing automobile trips reduces congestion and improves air quality
- Residents that patronize neighborhood stores return sales tax revenue that otherwise would be lost to other areas.

Disadvantages:

- Increased sharing of streets by pedestrians, bicyclists and cars maybe unpopular with motorists.
- Some retailers may feel their businesses will continue to be auto related and object to reduced motor vehicle amenities.
- Residential areas may resist direct connections with retail centers.

TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD)

TOD may be defined as moderately dense, mixed-use communities located within ¼ mile walking distance of transit stops. Studies have shown that housing densities of 7 to 15 units/acre can support local bus service and similar densities over larger areas may support light rail transit.

MINIMUM DENSITIES TO SUPPORT VARIOUS LEVELS OF TRANSIT SERVICE

TYPE OF TRANSIT	RESIDENTIAL (DU/ACRE)*	NON-RESIDENTIAL (MILL. SQ. FT.)
Minimal level of local bus service (@ 1 bus per hr)	4 to 6	5 to 8
Intermediate level of local bus service (@ 1 bus per ½ hr)	7 to 8	8 to 20
Light rail transit with feeder buses	9 & above	35 to 50
* AVERAGE NUMBER OF DWELLING UNITS (DU) PER ACRE		

Source: The Land Use - Air Quality Linkage, CA Air Resources Board.

Selected TOD Options:

- **Adopt Specific Plans** - designate areas around rail and transit centers as "transit villages"
- **Provide Incentives** - allow density bonuses for residential projects within ¼ mile of transit centers/corridors.
- **General Plan/Zoning Ordinance Amendments** - allow mixed-use and increased densities within ¼ mile of transit centers.
- **Bus Stops** - locate stops within 900 feet of housing-encourage transit "pop-outs" rather than bus turnouts.
- **Transit Waiting Areas** - areas should be visible and include amenities such as night lighting, shelters, benches, telephones, safe pedestrian access and landscaping.

MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

Example:

The Contra Costa Center (located near the Pleasant Hill BART [transit] Station), is a TOD community that features offices, retail and moderate to high density residential uses. Studies show that transit usage is significantly higher among residents of the area than in other parts of Contra Costa County.

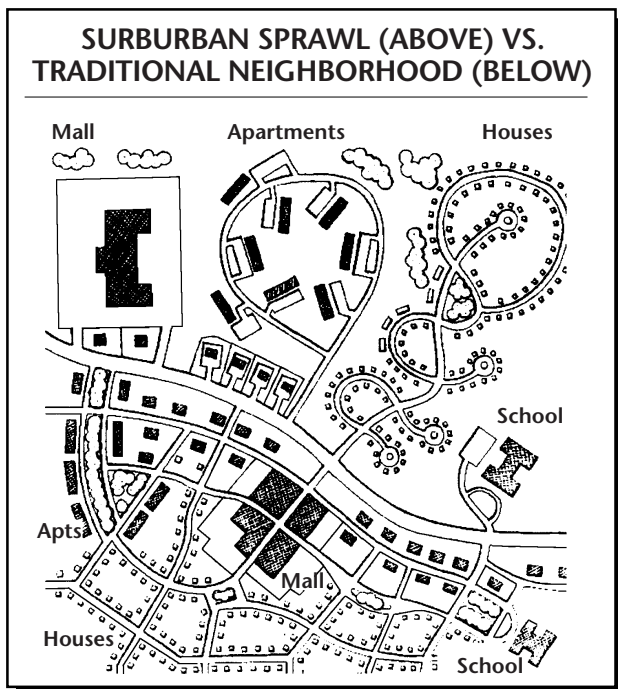
Advantages:

- Increased transit usage improves mobility for residents and relieves traffic congestion.
- TOD promotes more diverse land uses and provides a greater sense of “community”.
- Infrastructure could be provided more efficiently and at less cost to TOD communities.

Disadvantages:

- Bus service currently is the primary form of public transit in Ventura County - it is often slower and less convenient than driving.
- County residents may oppose increased TOD densities.
- Zoning ordinances may prohibit mixed-use, TOD development.

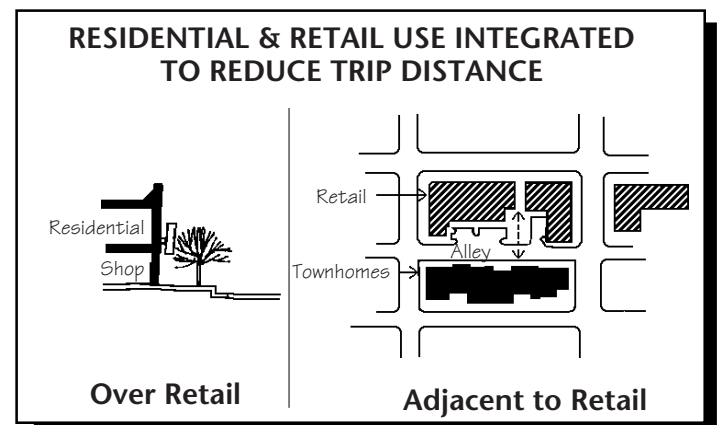
Unlike “exclusionary zoning” (single-use development with separate areas for housing, retail and offices), a mixed-use community includes a variety of compatible uses such as shops and housing located in close proximity, with services centrally located.



Source: The Energy Aware Planning Guide, California Energy Commission, Andres Duany & Elizabeth Platter-Zyberk, Town Planners, Miami, Florida

Selected Mixed-Use Options:

- **Inclusionary Zoning** - update zoning ordinances to permit a variety of residential/commercial uses in close proximity.
- **Vertical Mixing** - locate housing above shops/offices so that people's presence after business hours gives area new vitality.



Source: Land Use, Transportation and Air Quality, County of San Bernardino

- **Density Bonuses** - give development credits to commercial projects which include housing.

Example:

The City of Moorpark's Downtown Plan encourages mixed-use zoning which allows people to live above shops and businesses. This zoning is designed to invigorate the downtown, provide more affordable housing and reduce traffic.

Advantages:

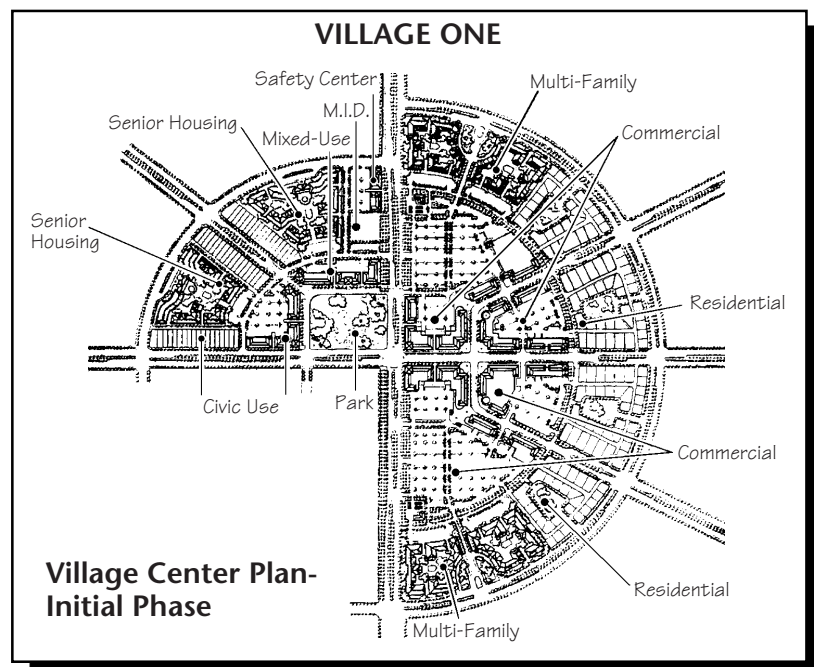
- Residents have the opportunity to work and shop closer to their homes
- The presence of people after business hours can be a deterrent to crime.
- Infrastructure could be provided more efficiently and at less cost for mixed-use projects.

Disadvantages:

- Zoning ordinances may prohibit mixed-use projects.
- Lending institutions usually focus on single-use buildings and may be skeptical of financing mixed-use development.
- Building codes may restrict the mixing of building types; mixed-use may also require different construction requirements.

HOUSING DIVERSITY

Although jobs have steadily migrated to the suburbs over the last decade, many suburban residents commute farther than ever. This is partially the result of "exclusionary zoning" that results in an under supply of housing, and rents and housing costs that price many workers out of the local residential market.



Source: Energy Aware Planning Guide, California Energy Commission

HIGHER DENSITY DEVELOPMENT

Selected Housing Diversity Options:

- **Diverse Housing Styles** - a variety of building heights and styles create a visually interesting community.
- **Diverse Housing Types** - a mixture of single-family, duplexes and townhomes produce a more compact and diverse community.
- **Inclusionary Housing Programs** - Requires developers to provide a percentage of new units at prices that are affordable to low/moderate income families.

Example:

Village One (City of Modesto), features a mixed-use community with apartments over shops and multifamily and senior housing close to the Village Center. The neighborhoods have a variety of single-family housing, with some on small lots to increase affordability (25% of the housing is affordable to low and moderate income families.)

Advantages:

- The housing supply will be enlarged.
- Opportunities are created for first-time home buyers.
- Lower income families are able to find housing closer to their worksites.
- New residents contribute to higher retail sales, thus revitalizing stagnant commercial areas.

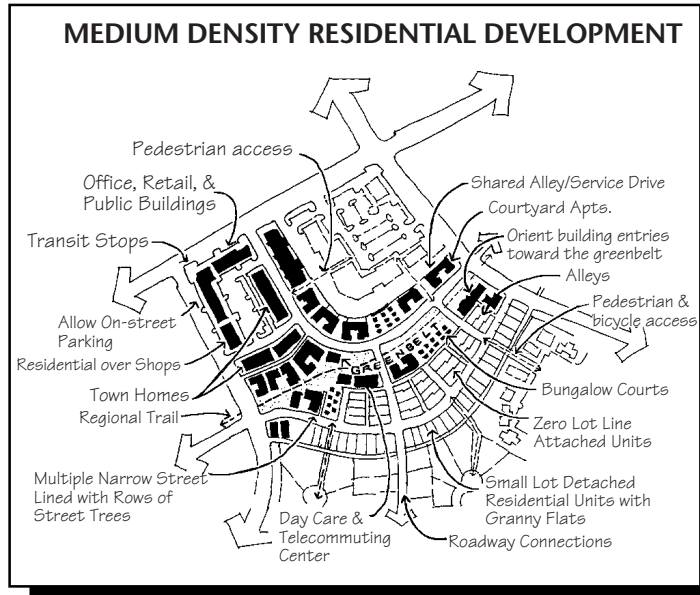
Disadvantages:

- Existing residents may fear that new residents in affordable housing are too transient or won't fit into the neighborhood.
- There may be attitudes against mixing households of different income levels.
- Concerns over diminishing property values and increasing crime.

Compact communities require less land and infrastructure, and per capita costs for providing public services are also reduced. Marginal increases in residential density (e.g., from 5 units/acre to 7 or 9 units/acre), can decrease vehicle trips and reduce the amount of farmland/open space land converted to new development.

Selected Higher Density Options:

- **Zero-Lot Line Units** - locating each unit, at or near the property line on one side, reduces land conversion.
- **Second Units** - allow construction of small units in the rear of existing homes or build units over garages, if codes permit.
- **Attached Housing Units** - rowhouses, townhouses and triplexes/fourplexes can be built at moderate densities and still provide backyards and landscaped open space.

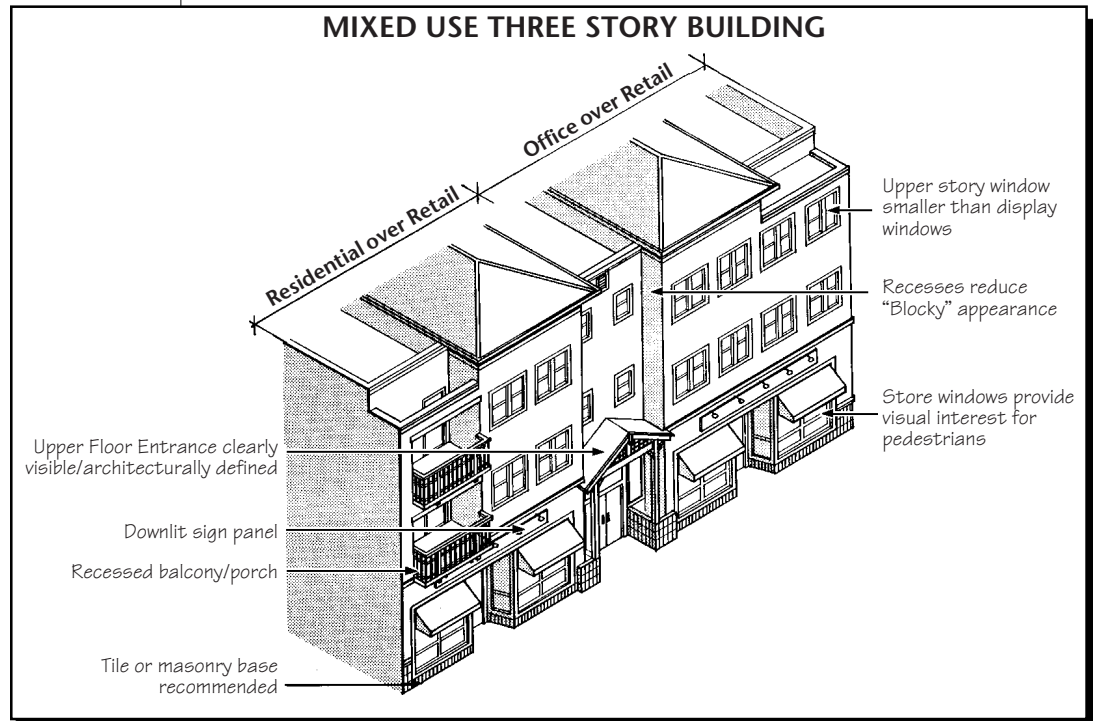


Source: Land Use, Transportation and Air Quality, County of San Bernardino

- **Reduce Lot Size, Setback and Yard Requirements** - good design enables these homes to both fit in with existing neighborhoods and reduce land costs.

Example:

The 15-acre San Paulo affordable housing project in the City of Irvine consists of flats and townhomes at an overall density of 25 units/acre. Prior consultation with residents in adjacent neighborhoods resulted in a project design that blended in with the existing community's character.



Source: City of San Buenaventura Downtown Specific Plan

INFILL DEVELOPMENT

Advantages:

- Denser housing uses less land and is generally less costly.
- Existing water and sewer lines often can be used to serve higher density infill development.
- Compact communities allow cities to establish urban limit lines, thus deterring the conversion of farmland to urban uses.

Disadvantages:

- A strong preference currently exists for large-lot, single-family housing.
- Current residents may object to changes in their neighborhood.
- Perception that higher density equates to lower income families, higher crime and lower property values.

Infill development provides an alternative to the continued conversion of open space and farmland on the urban fringes. Compact projects on



Source: City of San Buenaventura Downtown Specific Plan, August 1993

vacant parcels utilize existing streets and public services more efficiently thus lowering infrastructure costs and increasing the economic viability of cities.

Selected Infill Development Options:

- **Designate Areas** - areas of the city suitable for infill or redevelopment should be designated in the general plan.
- **Incentives** - density bonuses and reduced permit fees encourage infill projects.
- **Design Guidelines** - provide direction for developers by incorporating key design elements in one document for POD and TOD projects.

Example:

San Buenaventura's Downtown Specific Plan provides for new housing plus additional retail, offices and visitor serving uses. The City provides regulatory and financial incentives to encourage developers to build downtown (e.g., one potential project is the construction of housing on the former school district headquarters site).

Advantages:

- Unsightly vacant parcels are better utilized.
- Deteriorating urban areas are revitalized.
- Conversion of open space and farmland on the city fringes is reduced.

Disadvantages:

- Public attitudes may not support mixing households of various income levels.
- Banks/developers may not be motivated to fund or develop "Neo-traditional" infill projects.
- Land costs, unless "written down," may be higher than land on the city fringes.
- Land speculators will feel "robbed" of their potential profit.

NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

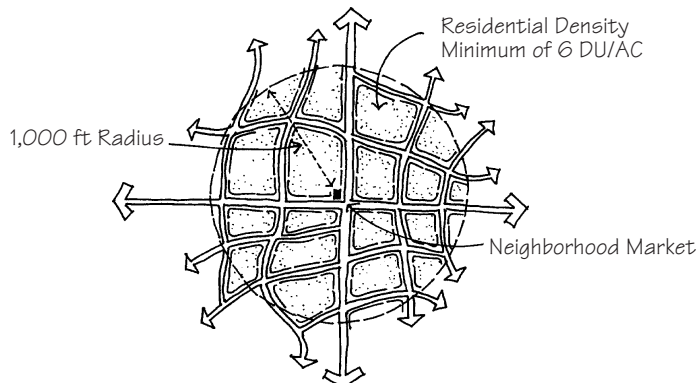
Locating retail and services within walking distance of homes, and modifying the design to make centers more accessible to pedestrians,

allows more people to switch from driving to walking or bicycling. Less land is needed for parking, and the concept creates a more attractive and varied environment for pedestrians.

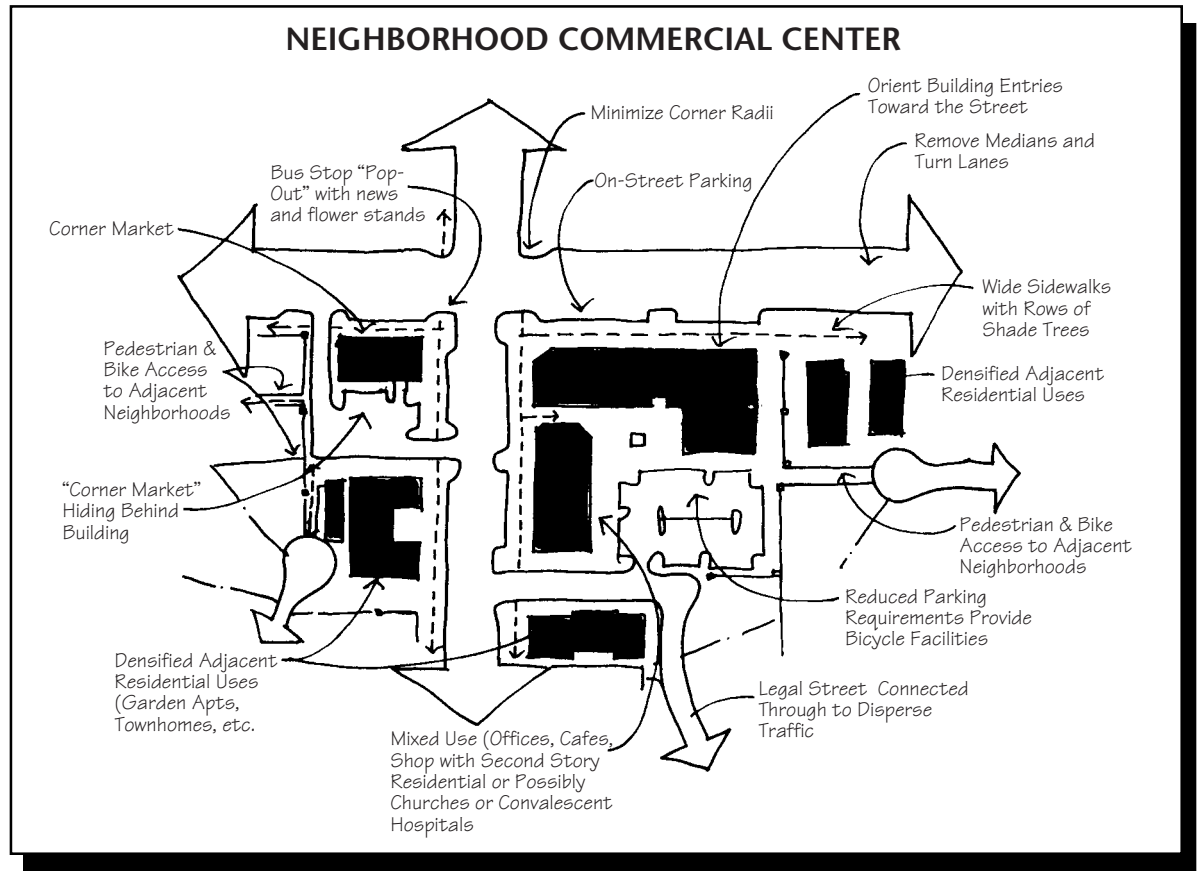
Selected Neighborhood Centers Options:

- **Locational Requirements** - centers are more likely to be successful if they are located along high volume pedestrian routes and are accessible from all directions.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT FOR NEIGHBORHOOD MARKETS



Source: Land Use, Transportation and Air Quality, County of San Bernardino



Source: Land Use, Transportation and Air Quality, County of San Bernardino

- **Building Placement** - orient buildings toward the street with shops located adjacent to the sidewalk to encourage pedestrian traffic.
- **Shared Parking** - adjacent projects can share parking spaces to reduce the total space devoted to parking.
- **Bicycle Amenities** - provide safe bicycle access and adequate bicycle parking.

Example:

A specific plan was prepared for a 32 acre parcel in Ventura's Saticoy neighborhood. The plan envisions narrow streets with many trees and mixed-use buildings that feature some apartments or offices located above the retail/commercial uses.

Advantages:

- Neighborhood centers provide opportunities for small, local businesses.
- Neighborhood centers enhance a sense of "community".
- Shopping/services within walking distances of homes provides convenience for residents.

Disadvantages:

- Merchants may object to reducing the amount of parking spaces.

SHOPS/SERVICES AT WORKSITES AND TRANSIT CENTERS

- Stores that require high volume sales may not be economically viable in lower density residential areas.

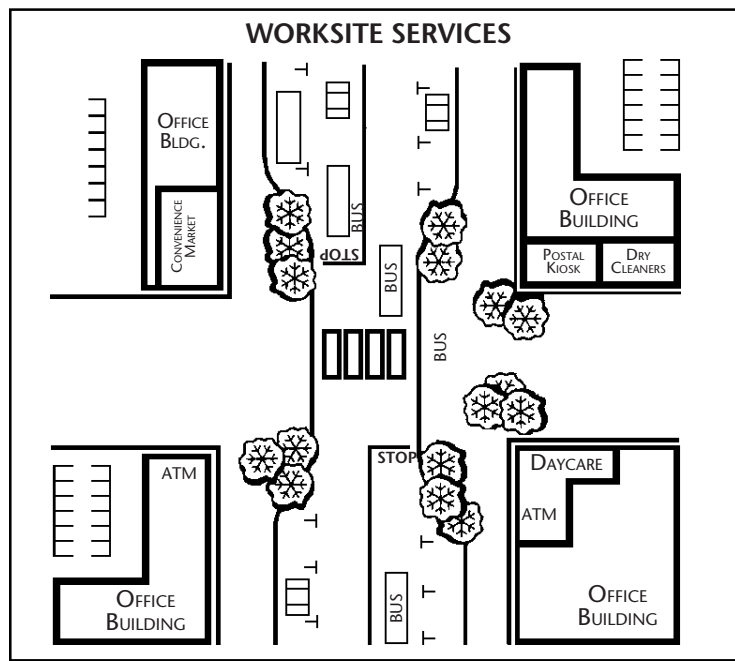
Locating shops and services at worksites and transit stops, enables workers to complete errands on foot, thus eliminating the need for a car. Uses could include banks, ATM's, postal facilities, health clubs and childcare services.

Selected Shops/Services Options:

- **Incentives** - provide density bonuses, expedited permit processing, etc.
- **Transit Centers** - work with transit agencies on joint development projects adjacent transit centers..
- **Zoning Code** - revise the code to allow a mixture of uses (e.g., a percentage of new commercial space is devoted to shops/services that serve employee needs).
- **Specific Plan** - prepare a plan for high employment generating land uses that includes zoning for shops/services.

Example:

The City of Los Angeles Central City West Specific Plan requires that 75% of a building's ground floor street frontage on certain streets be devoted to retail shops or services. The plan envisions a mixture of commercial and residential units just west of the downtown district.



Source: Energy Aware Planning Guide, California Energy Commission,

Advantages:

- Mixing land uses enhances the vitality of office parks by increasing the presence of people and activities after business hours.
- Childcare centers at worksites saves time and driving while allowing parents greater access to their child's needs during the workday.

Disadvantages:

- Mixed-use buildings with services may be difficult to market.
- Businesses may not be able to achieve a positive cash flow because of limited pedestrian traffic during non work hours.